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ABSTRACT

Progress made during the 1973-1974 school year by the Junior College District of Metropolitan Kansas City and priorities for the next year are discussed. The particular areas that are focused upon are: the accountability system, expanded access, participative governance, the district master plan, and future priorities. (DB)

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"THE STATE OF THE DISTRICT"

by

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presented at

Penn Valley Community College
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In their pungent and cogent book, "Teaching as a Subversive Activity," Postman and Weingartner relate the story of Ernest Hemingway when he was pressed to identify the character of a "great writer." Hemingway told the persistent questioner: "In order to be a great writer a person must have a built-in, shock-proof crap detector." This, our authors tell us, is also true for educators. "Our intellectual history," they assert, "is a chronicle of the anguish and suffering of men who tried to help their contemporaries see that some part of their fondest beliefs were misconceptions, faulty assumptions, superstitions, and even outright lies."

If "crap detection" is essential for both writers and educators, you can see the position in which that puts me at this point!

ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Yes, accountability is in. But accountability in education is not all that new. Three hundred twenty-five years ago John Hall, parliamentarian of Gray's Inn, London, was calling for accountability in his petition to Parliament "concerning the advancement of learning," called "An Humble Motion."

Using Hall's observation of 1649 as an informal yardstick, my purpose at this juncture is to provide an accounting of our progress during the year recently finished as well as to suggest priorities for the year to come. First, our accomplishments--I can say, truthfully, that, both administratively and instructionally, the District is well on its way toward fulfilling the requirements of Hall's concerns. That is, we are maintaining flexibility in our thinking; we are striving toward accountability; we are exploring new teaching/learning

modes, and putting the best ones into practice; we are stimulating our students to develop their intellectual powers to the fullest extent possible. And, certainly, we are attempting to provide a learning environment that facilitates the systematic acquisition of knowledge and the ability to translate knowledge into performance. Yes, the state of the District is healthy and I am increasingly confident, as I get to know each of you better, that the "torch of learning" is in good hands. This is not merely a subjective conclusion; it is buttressed by facts gathered during the intervening months.

We have also made considerable progress in addressing the four priorities I identified shortly after assuming the chancellorship last October: accountability system, expanded access, participative governance, and District Master Plan. While the new District organizational structure represents an effort to ensure greater accountability at all levels, perhaps our most significant accomplishments have been in the area of expanded access to further education.

EXPANDED ACCESS

At this period in the history of American higher education, when more and more students of college age are electing to stop out of school before embarking on further educational careers, and when all segments of higher education are competing for enrollments, it is notable, I think, that our enrollments have continued to increase. Since 1969, for example, when the three colleges were established, overall enrollments -- both headcount and FTE -- have risen by something more than 60 percent.

Last fall more than 13,000 persons of all ages were enrolled in a wide variety of programs and services offered by our colleges. Most of these students were preparing to enter realistic careers -- some immediately upon earning an associate degree and others following transfer to a four-year college or university and the completion of baccalaureate degrees. Other students were receiving short term specific job training in order to get work; others were updating job skills or participating in in-service training programs in order to earn a job promotion; and still others were studying in areas of personal enrichment.

Such an increase in enrollment would be exceptional under any circumstance; but particularly so during the past two years when post high school enrollments have been leveling off, and in many community college districts, actually decreasing.

Part of the explanation, of course, lies in the fact that the location of two District colleges in suburban areas has made it possible for more students to attend classes near their homes than had been the case when all programs were concentrated at the old Metropolitan Junior College. In fact, a comprehensive community college education is now available to every person in the Metropolitan Kansas City area within 10 miles of his home. But, here, a word of caution; we cannot -- and must not -- rely on availability alone to maintain the enrollment increases experienced thus far. There must be concerted effort by District and colleges to accelerate their recruitment programs if we are to avoid the same slump in enrollments that has been the unhappy lot of most multi-unit districts since 1972.

Another part of the explanation for increasing rather than decreasing enrollments is the fact that our colleges have been able to expand their certificate and career programs, both associate degree and pre-baccalaureate degree, to accommodate students seeking more diverse learning opportunities. For example, we are currently offering 40 associate degree career programs which prepare students for successful employment at the end of two years in many diversified fields such as aviation, business and allied health, to name but three representative programs. And these programs are in addition to the availability of the lower division of most, if not all baccalaureate degree career programs.

That quality has continued to characterize the instruction given to all students seems to be unquestionable, based on the GPA's earned at senior institutions by transfer students, as well as job performance follow-up studies. Among the 12 area colleges and/or universities which receive a majority of our pre-baccalaureate degree career students, the grade point averages of our graduates after their first semester ranged from 2.0 to 3.4. The mean of these grade point averages was a very creditable 2.7. Discounting initial transfer shock, this showing among our graduates is excellent, since, on a nationwide basis, community college graduates usually receive GPA's from 2.0 to 2.4 during their first semester at receiving four-year institutions.

Now, what do these statistics mean to us? They mean that, at our three colleges, we can boast a dedicated faculty whose principal concern it is to develop students who can compete successfully. They mean that quality education is our mutual concern, and that, as implementers, we are satisfying that concern.

But there is also a community dimension to our educational programs. To supplement the formal education, we have embarked upon an intensive outreach program leading to the establishment of "a community college without walls," one that utilizes alternative learning strategies and takes the learning programs off the campus out to the people who have a different set of needs that cannot be met by on-campus programs. This program seeks to meet the needs of those not presently served by District colleges, those who are non-academically inclined, those who want to pick up particular skills, and to open to a wide spectrum of disadvantaged persons ways by which they can lift themselves into an area of success and self-fulfillment.

These endeavors we have assigned to our new Metropolitan Institute of Community Services, established late last year as a major part of our District reorganization. Serving the four Missouri counties of Metropolitan Kansas City, the Institute's prime function is to plumb the needs and desires of all members of the community -- but especially of those who ordinarily would expect to receive little, if any, consideration; and to contract with the colleges and college and community personnel to satisfy those needs and desires whenever possible.

The Metropolitan Institute is composed of three centers: community education, urban studies, and career development; and uses learning sites in libraries; churches; schools; community centers; private homes; and business, industrial, governmental and welfare organization offices distributed throughout the Metropolitan area. It is dedicated

to making Metropolitan Kansas City a better place to live by helping each resident develop his or her fullest potential, to assisting community groups and organizations by designing educational programs to meet their needs, and to providing leadership for community restoration and development.

An example of Institute activity is the relationship between the Center for Urban Studies and the Street Academy on 27th Street, which now enrolls approximately 400 students -- young persons drawn largely from the streets they formerly thought were their only refuge. At the Street Academy they learn, first of all, that each of them is of value to the society; and, with certainty in mind, how to develop a willingness to become contributing members to it. Inadequate training for life in a democracy, an indifferent educational background, a conviction that in this country the only people who count are those who can "get away with it" -- all these and other areas of neglect and misconception we are patiently trying to rectify. I cannot stress too strongly the necessity of developing human resources the nation so desperately needs. We are making a strong bid to bring those resources into constructive influences for the years ahead.

Of course, in all of our endeavors, we have to consider fiscal realities. I think we've made a good beginning in this respect by taking to the Board, for the first time in a number of years, a budget for fiscal '75 which provides funds for developmental as well as maintenance purposes. Additional activities, intended to bolster that budget and those in the years ahead, include a concerted effort to maintain effective liaison with funding agencies -- particularly at the state level. At this point, however, there seems to be little likelihood of any increased state support in the year ahead.

Income to the District from federal sources --though not necessarily to be relied on in the future -- has been gratifying during the past year. Approximately $1,900,000 has been awarded to the District -- including funding for student aid, institutional aid, and vocational education, the latter in part shared by the state. These allocations are exclusive of the $1,000,000 grant to Penn Valley, to begin in fiscal '75, for a five-year developmental program. Penn Valley, one of only eleven institutions throughout the country to be the recipient of such an award, even now is embarking on preliminary plans to implement and carry its programs through fiscal 1979.

Incidentally, Penn Valley, with its $30 million campus, represents the first of our colleges to complete major permanent facilities, but additional facilities will be required here for future expansion, in addition to permanent campuses for Longview and Maple Woods. Another word about our suburban colleges -- though they have been providing yeoman services to their communities in woefully inadequate facilities, both colleges are located at the fringes of the District, and both already are serving many students from beyond District boundaries. The implications for expansion of our tax base through enlargement of our District boundaries seem self-evident.

PARTICIPATIVE GOVERNANCE

Participative Governance is only one of thirteen Task Forces that have been working

diligently over the past several months to put together recommendations for District development in such areas as Affirmative Action, Transportation, Expanded Access, Degree Requirement Revision, Student Personnel Services, Instructional Development, Staff Development, and other facets of the total program that are vital to the District's health. And while the final recommendations of the Participative Governance Task Force are yet to be filled and the new governance system installed, the task force activity has already provided a high degree of total family participation in the decision-making process and has contributed to a "spirit of self-study" in the District.

Another area of task force examination is HEW's mandated "Affirmative Action" plans; that is, equal opportunity for men and women, whites and nonwhites. This Task Force has come up with several recommendations to comply with HEW's guidelines and erase earlier criticisms of District practices. District policy, of course, supports the thesis that because a person is female, or nonwhite, she or he cannot be excluded from District employment. But it also supports the thesis that only the best qualified individuals should be added to its roster. Community colleges are purveyors of education -- not sociological panaceas. Yet, they cannot deny that past discriminations are true facts, or that future policy must be designed to eradicate such discriminations. Indeed, we do not deny it, and plans are being drawn that emulate our beliefs. The important thing to remember is that, in all of our activities, the student -- as a learning entity, as a developing personality -- remains the focus of our efforts.

Other tentative recommendations such as the following -- which have been selected at random -- illustrate the immense value of the creative and cooperative thinking of these task forces when applied to specific problems. For example:

> Among the recommendations developed for Student Personnel Services, two relate directly to the need for improving our recruitment programs to which I alluded earlier, and point the way toward action: First, "That the number of scholarships be increased to stimulate more interest on the part of students ranking in the upper third of their high school classes or with specialized interests." And, second, "That increased recruitment activities be directed toward populations other than high school seniors..." through specific means, which are enumerated, including "a much more extensive use of the mass media to communicate to all publics the opportunities available at and advantages of attending a Metropolitan District community college." This is one of the things we will be working on this year.
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> Another is the matter of Degree Requirement Revision. As recommended by the Task Force, the procedure for securing approval for proposals for degree requirement revision -- which, incidentally, may originate with any member or group within the District family -- will begin with the college instructional committees, (with the presidents' approval) move through a District Coordinating Committee, and proceed for final consideration by a District Council before being submitted to the Chancellor for his approval.

DISTRICT MASTER PLAN

From the findings and recommendations of these task forces, the guidelines for our 1985 District Master Plan even now are beginning to emerge. The need for an over-all plan that focuses all District activities, both current and projected, on desirable outcomes is self-evident. We must agree on our philosophy, goals and objectives, and how we expect to achieve them. We must be able to justify the activities we engage in to reach our goals. Obviously, the simplest course would be to call in outside consultants who would produce an erudite document telling us what their solutions to our problems would be. But, we think an in-house production will serve our purposes far more efficiently. It will consolidate the creative thinking of all members of the District family, bringing into active participation all those whose past and current services so amply demonstrate their competencies. The only outside consulting we anticipate is an architectural and engineering review of current facilities, and a projection of facility needs and their costs through 1985.

Staff responsibility for a District master plan and for seeing that the tasks involved are performed judiciously, I have delegated to the District Division of Planning and Development under the direction of Vice Chancellor Lee Stevens. Developing a viable plan for the District, as I have already said, will require considerable input from all groups and individuals within the District family, especially, if our colleges are to put together spin-off plans that delineate their own paths for the next decade, paths that will converge with those mapped out in the District plan. Therefore, over the next few months you can expect to receive many communications from Planning and Development eliciting your counsel and advice.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

This brings us to our other priorities for the year ahead. Time, however, will permit only a hurried listing of some of the more salient ones.

1. Expanded access - especially increase the evening and weekend college enrollment and expansion of community services offerings.
2. Student recruitment.
3. Educational development, including alternative learning modes and strategies.
4. Increased financial support, including funds development.
5. Expansion of District boundaries.
6. General obligation bond issue for completion of college facilities.
7. Increased community involvement.
8. Staff retirement system.

9. Staff development.

10. Affirmative Action.

11. District identity.

12. Student follow-up studies.

13. Systems development.

14. Study of staff classifications.

This, then, is a brief catalog of the year that has been and the one that is yet to be. The tempo of the latter, I promise you, will be as lively as the one before. There will be thousands of opportunities and as many aggravations. With your help we can meet those challenges and bear the frustrations. The year ahead will be exciting and exhilarating if, together, we can focus on our promise and the knowledge that the gift we have to offer, precarious as it may be, is the old one of imagination -- the lighted torch that passes from hand to hand. It will be a learning experience for all of us if we remember that we are all accountable for all that we do, accountable to ourselves, to the people of our District, and most of all to our students for what they become.

As we leave here today, the words of Albert Camus suggest the spirit which binds all of us together in common purpose:

"Don't walk ahead of me, I may not follow;
Don't walk behind me, I may not lead;
Walk beside me and just be my friend."

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